

Western Indiana: a perfect destination for autumn days.

By Sally Campbell Grout

Summer getaways can be tons of fun, but they're usually jam-packed with activities. Fall offers a different kind of weekend excursion. More relaxed. Slower paced. Refreshing. With the temperatures slowly creeping down, it's time to start thinking about how to spend your autumn days. It's also a perfect time to visit Western Indiana.

Breathtaking bridges.

When you walk through one old-fashioned covered bridge, lots of words come to mind. Historic. Rustic. Romantic. Well, get out your thesaurus, because each of Parke County's 30 covered bridges (765-569-5226) is worthy of a description all its own. To see every one, start at the Visitors Center in Rockville. There, you can pick up a map where routes ensure you won't miss any of these charming structures. You're welcome to meander through the bridges any time, but to truly celebrate them, you'll want to visit during the annual Parke County Covered Bridge Festival. Mark your calendar for October 14-23, 2005. Several communities throughout Parke County join in the celebration.

But the bridges aren't the only sight worth seeing in the area. The Bridgeton Grist Mill (765-548-0106) and the Historic Mansfield Roller Mill (765-344-0741), both built in the 1800s, are both still operational.

Start paddling.

Certainly, you could see a lot of beautiful scenery and those much-talked-about covered bridges by land. But how about getting a different perspective—from the vantage point of a canoe?

Sugar Valley Canoe Trips (800-422-6638) are located in Marshall, across from Turkey Run State Park. You can choose from four different trips, which range from 3.5 miles to 15 miles. (Time wise, the trips range from one-hour floats to overnight adventures.) Depending on the trip you choose, you may find yourself paddling through Turkey Run and/or Shades State Park, and you may see one, two, three or even four covered bridges. Sugar Valley Camping Cabins are also available. In addition, Sugar Valley Canoe Trips offers kayaks and tubes.

Clements Canoes, Inc. (765-435-7285) in Waveland also offers a variety of trips down Sugar Creek. Groups of all sizes are welcome, as are water travelers of all abilities. Mini Trips are perfect for families with small children; they usually last two to three hours and leave time for picnicking, fishing, and fossil hunting. On the other end of the "canoe spectrum," Clements Canoes offers an overnight 30-mile trip. Other trips

of varying lengths and challenges fall in between that range. Clements Canoes also offers kayaks and tubes.

If it's fall, it must be football season.

For much of the world, fall isn't complete without Saturday afternoon gridiron action. And with so many college towns in Western Indiana, you're sure to find someone to cheer for.

The rest of the year, Purdue University (765-494-4600) in West Lafayette can talk about its academic success stories. But Saturdays belong to the Big 10 Boilermakers. In Terre Haute, students and fans cheer for the Indiana State University (800-GO-TO-ISU) Sycamores and the Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology (812-877-1511) Fightin' Engineers.

Students at Wabash College (765-361-6100) in Crawfordsville and DePauw University in Greencastle (765-658-4800) may not attend particularly huge schools enrollment wise, but they know a big rivalry when they play it. Every year, they compete for the Monon Bell, a trophy that weighs in at approximately 300 pounds!

Festival fun.

If you've ever flipped through an Indiana Festival Guide, you'll see that a significant number of those festivals take place in the fall. You'll also find plenty of them happening in Western Indiana. Along with the aforementioned Parke County Covered Bridge Festival, here are a few you don't want to miss.

Some festivals celebrate the area's heritage. In Attica, the Potawatomi Festival (765-764-4943) September 16-18, 2005, takes place in Ouibache Park, on the banks of the Wabash River. The weekend's festivities include Indian dancing and displays, flea markets, entertainment, heritage, contemporary crafts, and great food. In West Lafayette, Feast of the Hunters' Moon (765-476-8411), September 24-25, 2005 is an annual favorite for many Hoosiers. Here, you'll find a reenactment of life during the 18th century and a French, British, and Native American trading post. See military demonstrations and enjoy food, crafts, and music. In Terre Haute's Pioneer Days (812-462-3392) October 1-2, 2005, pioneer village folk and crafters re-create 1840s skills, lifestyles, and crafts. Visit a working gristmill, a flea market, and gift shop.

Other festivals celebrate area products. In Rockville, the Billie Creek Village Sorghum-Molasses, Cider Making Days (765-569-3430) October 1-2, 2005 includes horse-powered sorghum press demonstrations, pure apple cider making, wagon rides, pottery, and craft demonstrations. The Covington Apple Fest (765-793-4122) October 1, 2005 features arts and crafts from more than 100 vendors, and, of course, apple products.

And still, other festivals are just about having fun. In Newport, the Newport Antique Auto Hill Climb (765-492-4220) September 30-October 2, 2005 includes an uphill drag race for antique cars, a collector car auction, a swap meet, a flea market, gas and oil memorabilia, crafts, and food. Good times and good food are in full supply at the Cataract Volunteer Fire Department Bean Dinner Festival in Spencer (765-795-4022) October 1-2, 2005. Here, seven hundred pounds of beans are cooked up in iron kettles while more than 100 vendors sell their products.

When the weather turns blustery...

Of course, the trade-off for those beautiful fall days is the occasional chilly, rainy one. When the skies turn gray, head indoors to some of Western Indiana's "covered" attractions. (And this time, we don't mean bridges.)

In both Covington (765-793-2710) and Crawfordville (800-866-3973), you can explore and hunt your way through several antique shops. Crawfordsville also has no shortage of museums. The General Lew Wallace Study and Museum, formerly known as the Ben-Hur Museum (765-362-5769), houses a lifetime of memorabilia of the noted lawyer, politician, Civil War general, diplomat, and author of Ben-Hur. The Lane Place Antebellum Mansion (765-362-3416) is the renovated home of Henry S. Lane, the founder of the Indiana Republican Party who was also instrumental in getting Abraham Lincoln nominated for the presidency. And the Old Jail Museum (765-362-5222), built in 1882, was once the Montgomery County Rotary Jail. The rotary jail, the first of seven built in the United States, featured a unique turning cellblock. The jailer would simply rotate the mechanism to the one and only opening, and put prisoners in or let them out. Eventually closed, it reopened as a museum in 1975. Today, it's the only operating rotary cellblock in the country.

Does art bring a ray of sunshine into your cloudy days? If so, visit the Art Museum of Greater Lafayette (765-742-1128). This accredited American Art Museum, affiliated with the Smithsonian, features permanent American and Indiana art collections, changing exhibits, programs, and studio classes. In Terre Haute, the Swope Art Museum (812-238-1676) displays work of American sculptors and painters including T.C. Steele, Edward Hopper, Thomas Hart Benton, and Grant Wood.

For the grade-school crew.

The one downside of fall in Western Indiana: one of the area's top attractions, Indiana Beach Amusement and Camp Resort in Monticello (574-583-4141) closes Labor Day weekend. However, there are plenty of ways to entertain the kids until it opens again.

Imagination Station by ASSET, Inc. in Lafayette (765-420-7780) features interactive displays, hands-on exhibits, and workshops related to space, science, engineering and technology. Exhibits range from computers to dinosaurs to astronauts. Kids can learn about air, electricity, sound, light, color, the human body, and more. The Children's Science & Technology Museum of Terre Haute (812-235-5548) also offers hands-on fun. On the agenda: producing a newscast, playing in the toddler room, and checking out the ever-changing exhibits.

Anyone who's driven a minivan full of hungry soccer players around probably has a pretty good idea of what a pack of wolves sounds like. But to hear and see the real thing, visit Wolf Park in Battle Ground (765-567-2265). At this non-profit education and research facility, visitors can see wolves at close range in their naturalistic enclosed home. Other animal residents include foxes and bison. Wolf Park is open from May through November and Saturday nights for "Howl Nights."

Western Indiana is waiting for you.

Find more fall festivals, shopping, and Western Indiana fun at enjoyindiana.com.